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Gifts Unfolding

The Lay
Vocation Today
with Questions for
Tomorrow

Bishops' Committee on the Laity
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

In its 1989 planning document, as approved by the general membership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in November 1988, the Bishops' Committee on the Laity was authorized to prepare a pastoral resource on the vocation and mission of the laity. *Gifts Unfolding: The Lay Vocation Today with Questions for Tomorrow*, part of the committee's continuing implementation of the 1987 International Synod of Bishops on the vocational mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, is that resource. The final text was reviewed by the members of the Committee on the Laity in November 1989, approved by Dolores R. Leckey, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Laity and Family Life, and is authorized by the undersigned.

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

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AT CLAREMONT
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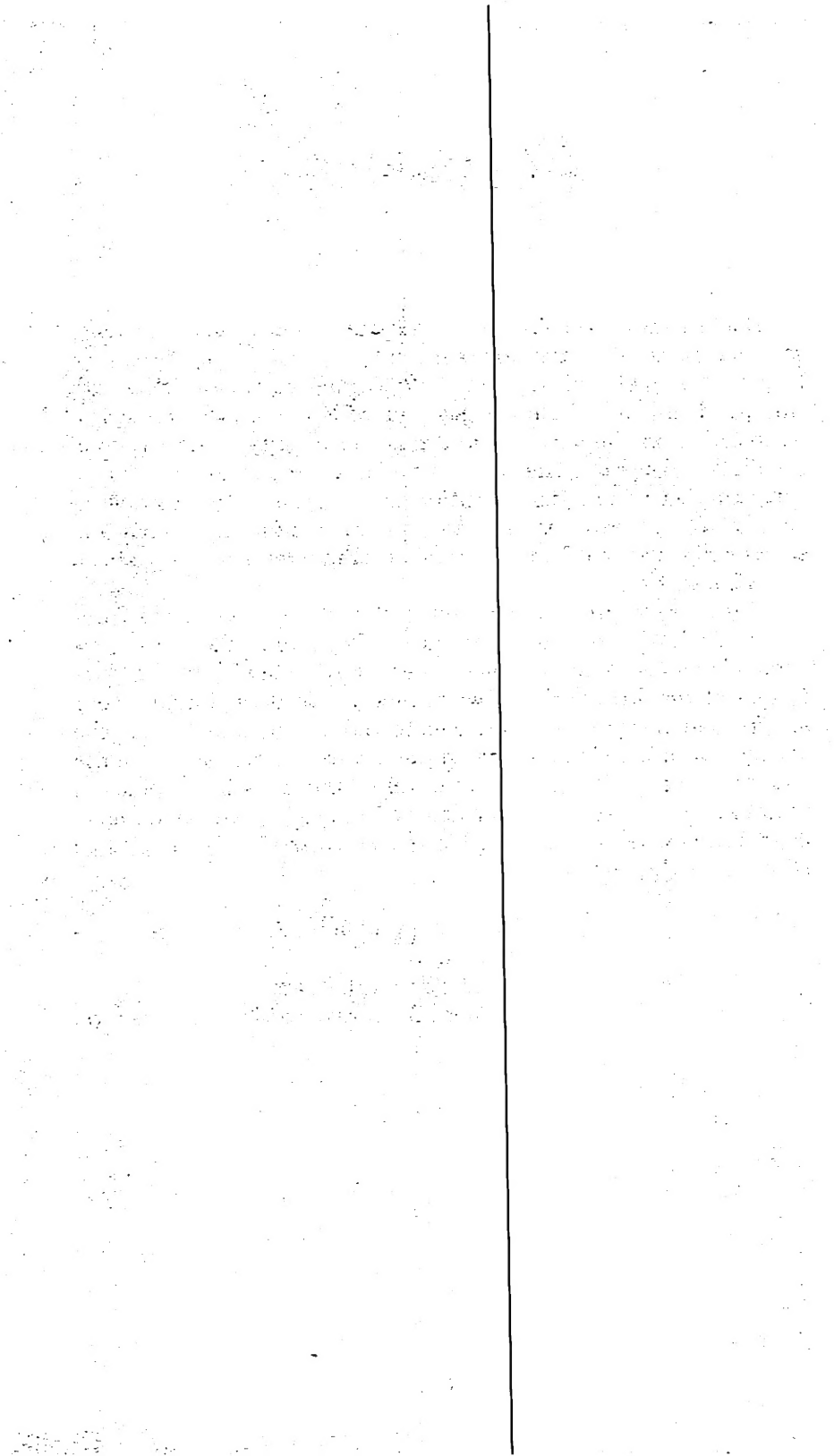
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Foreword

Books that synthesize a large amount of material on theological and pastoral issues are especially useful in my ministry. Perhaps you feel that way, too. *Gifts Unfolding* was written with this need in mind. In its pages you will find a brief historical perspective on the vocation and mission of laity, a synthesis of conciliar and postconciliar teaching on laity, and an articulation of some questions in need of attention as the role of laity continues to develop. It is intended to be generally informative for all laity and specifically practical for those in leadership roles, such as pastoral council members.

Gifts Unfolding was inspired by the 1987 Synod on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity and by Pope John Paul II's post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Christian lay faithful, *Christifideles Laici*. I think these two events constitute a plateau in our efforts, begun some fifty years ago, to understand and develop the proper role of laity in and through the Church. A plateau is not the summit, a point at which to cease climbing. It is but a place to pause and, from the view afforded by it, to survey where we have been and how far we still need to travel. *Gifts Unfolding* is some reading for the plateau.

Most Reverend John S. Cummins
Chairman
Committee on the Laity
National Conference of Catholic Bishops



Introduction

"We'll wrap this up by Christmas," said one expert theologian who was accompanying his bishop to the first session of Vatican II. "A few pronouncements and we'll be back to normal."

"The Church will be forever changed by this Council," said another. "It may be the most radical event since St. Paul started preaching to the Gentiles."

History has shown the second assessment to be closer to the truth, although it is still too soon, even after twenty-five years, to measure the full impact of Vatican II. One thing is certain: Vatican II was a major turning point for the modern Church, and nowhere has that been felt more than in the life of the laity.

Vatican II gave more attention to the laity than any Council had ever done before. It issued an entire document on the role of the laity, the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. Its vision for the future, set forth in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, presupposed that the laity would be the primary ones to carry it out.

Its primary description of the Church in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* rested on the notion of the People of God, while chapter four elaborated the nature of the laity. The central theme of the liturgical renewal in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was the "full, conscious, and active participation" of the laity. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* concluded with chapter six on the importance of Scripture in the daily life of the faithful, urging a response of faith to the living Word of God.

Other documents like those on education, communications, ecumenism, religious liberty, and missionary activity relied on the laity for implementation. But Vatican II was not the last word. In 1987 the synod of bishops discussed *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty-Five Years After Vatican II*.

Following a year-long consultation of the laity around the world and a one-month meeting of the bishops in Rome, Pope John Paul II issued his apostolic exhortation, *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*

(*Christifidelis Laici*) (hereafter referred to as *Christian Lay Faithful*).

These official, hierarchical statements represent unprecedented attention to the laity. And yet, many lay persons, even leaders in parishes and dioceses, are unaware of them. That is why *Gifts Unfolding* has been published.

The purpose of this book is to summarize the key points of Vatican II and the exhortation of Pope John Paul II. It is intended for the whole People of God, but especially for lay persons who hold leadership positions on parish staffs, councils, committees, or organizations. It is for those who may have forgotten what Vatican II said, or who never had a chance to read and study the documents, or who don't know Pope John Paul II issued an exhortation on the laity.

In a special way this book is for the generation of adult lay leaders who were born and raised after Vatican II. It is through them that the legacy of Vatican II lives on; it is for them that the wisdom of Vatican II is handed on.

Gifts Unfolding can be used in several ways.

1. Primarily it is a *reference* book for those who want to find out quickly and easily what the hierarchy has said about the laity.
2. It is a *study* book for those who want to discuss and understand the hierarchical viewpoint on the laity. This can be done as part of a regular meeting, in special study sessions, during time for planning, or in small-group gatherings.
3. It is a *practical* book for those who follow the suggestions for application at the end of each chapter or who devise their own ways of putting this material into practice. This can be done either in private or, preferably, in a group.
4. It is an *agenda* that can be used at regular meetings or planning sessions or at retreats and weekends when parish leaders get away together.
5. It is a *stimulus* for further reading, study, and discussion, especially of entire documents pertaining to the laity. This can be done either privately or in groups.

However it is used, *Gifts Unfolding* is offered with the awareness that all the People of God are companions in the Spirit, co-disciples in the Church, and collaborators in the mission of Jesus Christ. The more that unity is affirmed, the more fruitful the labor will be.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Context

"Congratulations, Linda," said the voice on the phone. It was Fr. Bill, the pastor. "You've been elected to the parish council. I'm really looking forward to working with you and the other members of the council. We want to make our parish a real Vatican II church, and I know you'll make a great contribution."

Linda sat quietly for a moment after the phone call. "Who was that?" asked her parents who were visiting.

"Fr. Bill. He just told me I was elected to the parish council."

"Well, congratulations," said her mother. "I remember the first time we were on a parish council, right after Vatican II. We had no idea what we were to do, and I don't think the priests did either. All we knew was everything was changing because of Vatican II. It's so much different now."

"I'm not so sure, Mom. Fr. Bill said we want to make our parish a real Vatican II church. But Vatican II is all I've ever known. What other kind of parish is there? I was just an infant during the Council and I don't remember reading or studying what Vatican II said."

"To tell you the truth," her father said, "I don't remember reading the Vatican II documents either. We just picked things up as we went along. Maybe this will be your chance to learn what Vatican II actually said."

If this *were* the chance for Linda to learn what Vatican II actually said, what would she learn? How did Vatican II change the role of the laity? What was the role of the laity prior to Vatican II?

Pre-Vatican II

Vatican II was a turning point in the role of the laity in the Church but Vatican II did not occur in a vacuum. It drew upon more than fifty years of lay activity, epitomized in a movement called Catholic Action.

Catholic Action

In the early part of the twentieth century the Catholic Church had a hard time bringing the message of the gospel into European life. The rise of modern industry, the spread of socialism, and the impact of World War I made the institutional Church seem isolated and irrelevant.

Pope Pius X, and after him Pius XI, issued a new call to the laity. It was a call to deepen the spiritual and intellectual life of the faithful so they could bring the gospel more effectively into the world.

Vatican II summarized the aim of such lay activity this way:

... [T]o make the gospel known and [people] holy, and to form in them a Christian conscience so that they can infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life. (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 20).

This movement was officially called Catholic Action and was defined as "the collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 20). The apostolate of the hierarchy, of course, is to spread the gospel, and the particular collaboration of the laity was to spread the gospel in the world under the guidance of the hierarchy. One of the means for doing this was the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), which not only provided religious education for Catholic children who attended public schools but also organized evangelization and outreach programs in the community.

Lay Organizations

In addition to Catholic Action, officially approved and sponsored by the hierarchy, many other lay organizations were either begun or revitalized. Some like the Vincent de Paul Society were *apostolic*, that is, their primary purpose was to provide services, especially to the poor. Others like the Knights of Columbus and the

Serra Club were *beneficent*, that is, their primary purpose was to support worthy causes and to strengthen the Catholic identity of their members.

Still other organizations like the Holy Name Society or Sodality of Our Lady were *devotional*, that is, their primary purpose was to deepen the spiritual lives of their members. A few organizations like the Legion of Mary or the Christian Family Movement combined all three purposes.

In addition to these organizations, there was a great need for volunteers to help with the liturgy (ushers, choirs, sacristans); with religious education (Sunday School, Catholic Youth Organization); and with special parish activities such as census, bingo, scouts, fund raisers, auxiliaries, and guilds.

Lay Congress

The growing involvement of the laity in the Church prompted Pope Pius XII to assemble an International Congress of the Laity in 1951 and again in 1957. Pius XII also called for greater participation of the laity in the liturgy with his encyclical on the liturgy (*Mediator Dei*), introduction of the Latin "dialogue" Mass, and revision of Holy Week services. He enhanced the dignity of the laity with his encyclical on *The Mystical Body of Christ* (June 29, 1943) and he continually encouraged the work of the laity through Catholic Action.

Pius XII was succeeded by John XXIII who, of course, convened the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II

The Council combined over fifty years of unprecedented lay activity with a fresh emphasis on the dignity of the laity. Prior to the Council the laity's status in the Church as members of the Mystical Body and their special apostolate in the world were prominent. Vatican II reaffirmed these themes, but also gave them a distinctive twist.

Vatican II Contributions

The laity's status in the Church was usually described in terms of their relationship with the hierarchy. The preeminent task of

the laity was to collaborate with the hierarchy through Catholic Action.

Vatican II described the laity's status primarily in terms of their sacramental relationship with Christ. The preeminent task of the laity was to collaborate with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 3).

This approach put more emphasis on the sacramental and charismatic qualities of the laity, which in turn stressed the communal aspect of the Church as the People of God. To be sure, Vatican II asserted very clearly that the community of believers, the Church, is a hierarchical community and that the gifts of the Spirit are finally discerned by the hierarchical leaders of the Church.

... [B]elievers need to enjoy the freedom of the Holy Spirit who "breathes where he wills" (Jn 3:8). At the same time they must act in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors. The latter must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts not in order to extinguish the Spirit, but to test and hold fast to what is good (cf. 1 Th 5:12, 19, 21) (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 3).

Overall, however, Vatican II shifted the perspective from a hierarchical to a sacramental one. For those, like Linda's parents, who had been given only a hierarchical perspective on the laity, this could feel like a very radical shift.

Something similar occurred regarding the laity's special apostolate in the world. Vatican II reaffirmed this constantly, but it also offered a more positive and inviting concept of the world than Catholics were used to hearing before Vatican II. As a result, the image of the lay apostolate was that of fellow citizens and journeyers, collaborating with people of good will to improve the world.

Vatican II captured this sentiment at the beginning of its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

... [N]othing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their [the faithful's] hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men

[and women]. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man [and woman]. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with all mankind and its history (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Modern World*, no. 1).

Documents

In the final documents of Vatican II, different points of view about the laity are evident. These are set forth with no attempt to produce a single, final version. They are more like a reminder of what should be included in an understanding of the laity. In general, three approaches appear in the documents.

1. *Sacramental*—The laity belong to the People of God through baptism and confirmation. This is the root relationship from which all else derives. Baptism bestows an equal dignity on each person prior to any other function or status in the Church. Confirmation imparts the gifts of the Spirit, which each person has the right and the freedom to use.
2. *Hierarchical*—The laity are a hierarchical people. This means they share in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and pastoral roles of Jesus. They exercise these functions within the Church under the guidance of duly appointed pastors (bishops and priests) as well as in their daily lives. The Council, for example, speaks of the family as the “domestic Church” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 11).
3. *Secular*—The laity are specially entrusted with bringing society (also called “the temporal order”) into harmony with God’s intentions. The secular experience and lifestyle of the laity enable them to transform society from within, as a part of it. This means they often have to take initiatives and face questions that the hierarchy is not able to answer.

These three viewpoints shape the definition of the laity according to Vatican II. They all have to be taken into account, although how this is done in practice is left to the post-Vatican II Church to work out.

Post-Vatican II

The shifts made at Vatican II almost immediately opened new arenas for lay activity. The U.S. bishops noted these favorably in their 1980 statement *Called and Gifted*, and Pope John Paul II listed the major postconciliar developments in his exhortation as:

... the new manner of active collaboration among priests, religious and the lay faithful; the active participation in the Liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis; the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as a lay commitment in the life of the Church; and in the fuller and meaningful participation of women in the development of society (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 2).

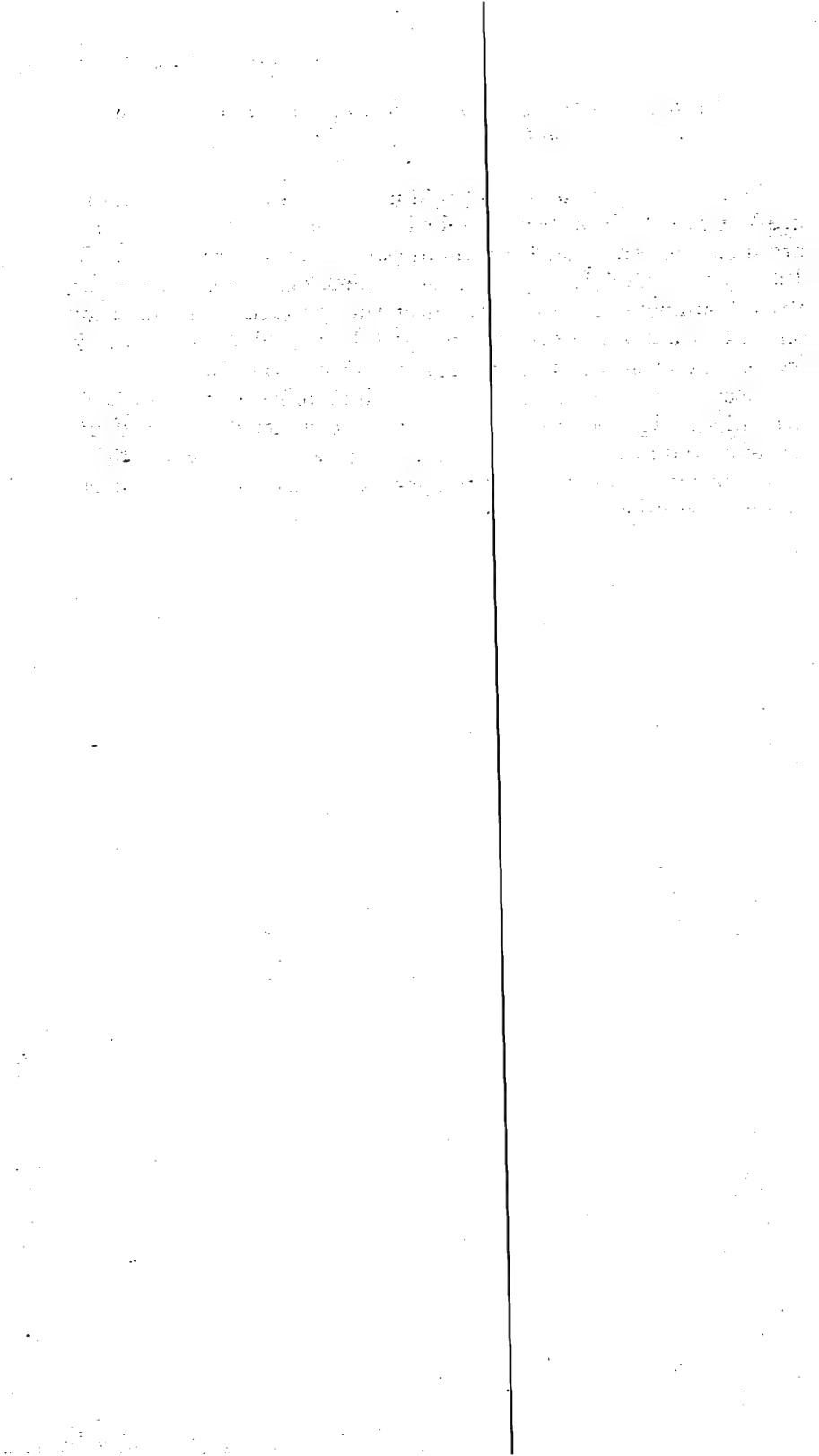
At the institutional level, there have also been some very important developments regarding the laity since Vatican II.

1. The Pontifical Council for the Laity was established at the Vatican. This gives a structural affirmation to the concerns and role of the laity at the level of the central administration of the Church.
2. The *Code of Canon Law* contains for the first time a list of the rights of the laity, including such items as the right to freedom in secular affairs (canon 227), the right to theological education (canon 229), and the right to decent remuneration when working for the Church (canon 231).
3. Two synods of bishops have addressed issues of prime importance to the laity. In 1980 the topic was the family and in 1987, as already noted, the topic was the vocation and mission of the laity.
4. The institutional Church in our country has fostered comparable developments. In 1975 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops established a standing Committee on the Laity and two years later organized a Secretariat to staff it. The Committee on the Laity has sponsored over the years a number of national consultations with the laity, including the major consultation process prior to the 1987 International Synod of Bishops. *Called and Gifted*, a pastoral statement of the U.S. Bishops commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of

Vatican II's *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, was prepared by the Committee on the Laity in 1980.

Where has this history brought us? How are we different from pre-Vatican II? What began and what ended at Vatican II? These are questions that need continual pondering and response. The 1987 synod asked just these kinds of questions. When Pope John Paul II summed up his reflections on the synod in his exhortation on the *Christian Lay Faithful*, he used the parable of the vineyard owner who hired workers throughout the day (Mt 20:1-16).

According to this parable, we are all laborers for the Lord. We are called and gifted to work in his vineyard, which is the world. We are expected to work together, in communion as branches with a vine. We are companions in the Spirit, co-disciples in the Church, and collaborators in mission.



CHAPTER TWO

Companions in the Spirit

As you approach your parish church for Sunday Mass, one of your good friends who is on the parish council comes up to you waving the parish bulletin. "I see you're now on the finance committee. Congratulations. I hope you'll be able to attend our retreat weekend with the staff. It is the one, and just about only, spiritual benefit that makes all the work worthwhile."

During Mass you keep wondering about that statement. Your friend made it sound like the retreat and the parish work were two separate things. You even got the impression that they were in conflict with each other or that the retreat was a reward for work that detracted from your spirituality. Besides, spirituality isn't something *you* do; it's what God does for you and with you in all the activities of your life.

But you can't help recalling stories you have heard about the pickering that sometimes occurs at parish meetings. You have personally known some parishioners who became very bossy when they had a little authority, and others who found themselves spending far more time and energy than they thought they would when they first volunteered.

You're still thinking about the connection of spirituality and parish involvement and God's role when the eucharistic ministers leave to take communion to the homebound parishioners. Perhaps a ministry like that is the answer, you think. At least, it seems a lot more spiritual than drawing up the budget and figuring out how to raise the money for it.

On your way home, you keep wondering: How does God make us holy? Is it through Mass and the sacraments? A special retreat? Some type of ministry? Or is it through our daily work and activities? Is it all of these?

Holiness

The Call

Yes, it is. Everything you do should contribute to your holiness. This was one of the major points stressed by the Second Vatican Council. The Council was equally emphatic that *all* people are called to holiness.

Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 40).

Pope John Paul II reiterated this sentiment in his exhortation by declaring the vocation to holiness "the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them [the faithful] in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 16).

This call to holiness establishes the People of God as companions in the Spirit through the sacraments. Pope John Paul II expressed it this way:

The call to holiness is rooted in *Baptism* and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the *Eucharist*. Since Christians are re clothed in Christ Jesus and refreshed by his Spirit, they are "holy" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 16).

This holiness is not a private possession, however. It spills over into activities like working on a parish finance committee, taking communion to the sick, or making a retreat. And it doesn't stop there.

The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 17).

Holy Activity

The Second Vatican Council was very clear that holiness is not opposed to ordinary activity.

In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God and who obey the voice of the Father (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 41).

After this statement, the Council described the work of bishops, priests, ministers, parents, widows, single people, laborers, the poor, the sick, and the persecuted as a source of their spiritual life. The Council concluded by saying:

All of Christ's faithful, therefore, whatever be the conditions, duties, and circumstances of their lives, will grow in holiness day by day through these very situations, if they accept all of them with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father . . . (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 41).

What Vatican II envisioned, Pope John Paul II described as

. . . a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both women and men, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring laborers who work in the Lord's vineyard (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 17).

The realm of daily activity in the world is, of course, the special place of holiness for lay people, as the U.S. bishops declared in *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*.

It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 31), in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss (pp. 4, 5).

Surely if God sanctifies people in these circumstances, the same should occur in the work of a parish finance committee or the service of eucharistic ministers. But how is holiness actually developed through these activities? If it doesn't happen automatically, how does it happen?

Formation

Vatican II broke new ground by calling for a formation of the laity that parallels the formation of priests and members of religious communities. Pope John Paul II has called this "... not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 63).

The formation Vatican II had in mind "takes its special flavor from the distinctively secular quality of the lay state and from their own form of spirituality" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 29).

The Council went on to say that this means "a certain human and well-rounded formation adapted to the natural abilities and circumstances of each lay person" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 29).

Pope John Paul II sharpened this personal focus by recommending "... recourse to a wise and loving spiritual guide as well as a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God ..." (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 58).

Where is this to take place? According to Pope John Paul II, in "the parish, which has the essential task of a more personal and immediate formation of the lay faithful." This parish formation occurs through "hearing God's Word, in liturgical and personal dialogue with God," through charity and active participation in the Church's service to others.

Within the parish "... *small Church communities* ... can be a notable help in the formation of Christians" by providing the experience of community and mission (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 61). The richness of small Christian communities is especially characteristic of Hispanic Catholics and is one of their great contributions to the larger Church.

The liturgy remains the central and culminating formation experience. The rhythm between community in the Church and mission in the world was succinctly stated by Vatican II in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

... [T]he liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows (no. 10).

This image of the Church's activity culminating in liturgy and then spilling over again into the world is elaborated further by the Council in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Speaking of the laity's participation in the priestly role of Jesus, the Council said,

For all their works, prayers, and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pt 2:5) (no. 34).

The “spiritual sacrifices” of the laity are real sacrifices; they are the accumulation of all those events and people that make up their daily life. These are brought to the liturgy and united with the sacrifice of Jesus so that the union of the faithful with the Lord and with one another can become a fountain for new mission activity.

From this perspective serving on the finance committee and taking communion to the sick are holy activities that contribute to the formation of those who carry them out. As Pope John Paul II remarked about the holiness of the laity:

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called “spiritual” life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called “secular” life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 59).

Continuing Questions

The important contributions of Vatican II and Pope John Paul II provide the basis for responding to issues with which the Church continues to struggle, such as:

- one spirituality with different expressions possessing equal dignity,
- activity as a *source* of spirituality, and
- small communities and the larger Church.

One Spirituality, Different Expressions

Vatican II insisted that there is one common spirituality for all Christians. At the core of the Catholic experience of this common spirituality is the priestly ministry of Jesus in which all

the baptized share, though in different ways. When Vatican II described these different ways, it used an expression that is misleading to many people.

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 10).

The phrase, "essentially different," which was also used by John Paul II (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 22), sounds like there are two different kinds of priesthood, separate from one another. This was not the intention of either Vatican II or Pope John Paul II. By saying they are essentially different, the Council and the pope meant that they are not simply interchangeable. What the hierarchical/ministerial priesthood does cannot be done by the common priesthood, and what the common priesthood does cannot be done by the hierarchical/ministerial priesthood.

More than that, what each does requires the other. Pope John Paul II made this very explicit regarding the hierarchical/ministerial priesthood when he said "the ministerial priesthood, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, essentially has the royal priesthood of all the faithful as its aim and is ordered to it" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 22).

It is not easy trying to describe this kind of *difference-within-unity*. Vatican II faced the same challenge in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. The parallels in that document shed some light on the meaning of the priesthood discussion.

Words and Deeds: There is one revelation of God that is communicated through words and deeds.

... [T]he works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 2).

Scripture and Tradition: There is one divine source of revelation, but there are two streams through which it flows.

Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in

some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no 9).

Old and New Testaments: The inspired writings of both the Jewish and Christian people make up one Bible for Christians. They are equally inspired although different from one another.

God, the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments, in his wisdom has so brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be made manifest in the New (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 16).

The supreme expression of diversity in unity, of course, is the Trinity. To grasp the relationship of the ministerial and common priesthood within the one priesthood of Jesus is to glimpse into the very life of God.

The relationship between the common priesthood and the hierarchical priesthood is not just a theoretical question. On a practical level, each person should have access to the spiritual resources that are available through the Church. The *Code of Canon Law* says explicitly that the faithful have "the right to receive assistance . . . out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the Word of God and the sacraments" (canon 213). Holiness is not a privilege of the elite but an invitation to all.

Practically, the burden of responsibility falls on the clergy. Regarding the liturgy, for example, Vatican II said:

Pastors of souls must realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 11).

The same priority is given to the reading, understanding, and praying of Scripture. To this end, translations are to be made available so the faithful "can familiarize themselves safely and profitably with the sacred Scriptures, and become steeped in their spirit" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 25).

The theme of "full, active, and conscious participation," repeated constantly in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* as "... the aim to be considered before all else . . ." (no. 14), is not just the aim of liturgical spirituality but of the whole spiritual life. The norm established for liturgical renewal is also applicable to other forms of spiritual development.

The norm is twofold: all liturgical rites should be *simple*, and understanding them should be *easy*. Simplicity means uncluttered, free of confusion and excess. It also means brief, purposeful, and smooth. There is a harmony and beauty to that that is simple; the resources of the spiritual life should manifest the same qualities.

Ease refers to understanding. Rituals and actions should be intelligible. People should not be expected to carry out directions when they do not know their purpose. And when people understand the rites, it is easier to connect everyday activity with the liturgy as a source of spirituality.

Activity as a Source of Spirituality

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy suggests several opportunities for bringing the secular experience of the faithful into worship, not to sanctify what is unholy but to celebrate and affirm the spiritual quality of life as it is actually lived.

Prayers of the Faithful—Within the eucharistic liturgy the prayers of the faithful provide one opportunity for offering the daily, secular life of the faithful as an important part of the total offering of Mass (no. 53). This is made even more explicit if the people themselves add their own petitions or can at least have them included in petitions prepared for Mass.

Sacramentals—Sacramentals like blessings, art objects, gestures, clothing, aromas, dance, music arise from everyday life and express its intrinsic holiness. As the Council commented, "There is scarcely any use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of people and the praise of God" (no. 61).

Divine Office—Many Catholics feel that praying the divine office is something just for priests and members of religious orders. Vatican II corrected this notion. First, it used the proper term to refer to this prayer, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, and then clarified its purpose, "to sanctify the day" (no. 88). Even if the official liturgy of the hours is not used by the lay faithful, it is a reminder that the time of each day and the way it is spent is sacred to God.

Music and Environment—The liturgy usually takes place in church, but churches do not drop down from heaven. They are built up with human labor and skill and artistry. The places where people worship and pray should be filled with the work of human hands and the sound of human voices. Indeed, as the Council encouraged, "The art of our own times from every race and country shall be given free scope in the Church . . ." (no. 123). In a

pluralistic culture like the United States, it would be fitting for a parish with African American, Hispanic, and Oriental parishioners to display art from those cultures.

Likewise, music is extolled for “. . . making prayer more pleasing, promoting unity of minds, and conferring greater solemnity upon the sacred rites” (no. 112).

These adaptations are made more easily in small communities, but such communities pose their own problems.

Small Communities and the Larger Church

Official church documents usually speak in general terms of “the Church” and “the lay faithful.” But most of the lay faithful experience the Church in a parish and often in smaller communities within a parish. This is where the spiritual life is nourished and where people grow in holiness. What is the connection between these small communities and the parish? What is the connection between the parish and the Church at large?

Vatican II’s understanding of community is best seen in its *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, where it spoke of “Forming the Christian Community” (no. 15).

The foundation of this community is the sacramental life. Each community should be mature, that is, “. . . able to provide for its own needs as far as possible” (no. 15). Another way of saying this is that “[t]his community of the faithful . . . must be deeply rooted in the people” rather than be dependent on outsiders.

When the community does turn its attention to the outside, it is for service. This is channeled through both ecumenical and social activities. In all of this, “[v]arious types of ministry are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community.” This includes the ministries of the ordained as well as those in religious communities.

Pope John Paul II also endorses the value of small communities, going so far as to call for “adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, . . . in promoting participation of the lay faithful.” He also sees small communities as “true expressions of ecclesial communion” when united with their pastors (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 26).

This view expresses the Catholic tendency to see the Church first as an organic whole that expresses itself in particular places as a local church (diocese, parish, community). The universal Church is not simply a collection of individual local churches that

first come into being as local churches.

To insure the connection of small communities with the larger Church, the pope offers five criteria:

- primacy given to the call to holiness,
- responsibility of professing the Catholic faith,
- strong communion with the pope and local bishop,
- participation in the Church's goals of evangelization and sanctification, and
- involvement in human society (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 30).

These criteria, like all the guiding principles of Vatican II and the pope, need to be learned, tested by practice, refined, developed, and applied to new situations. Just as everyone is called to holiness, so everyone's experience contributes to making the faithful companions in the Spirit.

Application

Suppose it is one year later and you are at your parish church for Sunday Mass. A friend comes up to you and says he has been asked to join the finance committee, but he has a few questions that you might be able to answer for him. In light of this chapter on "Companions in the Spirit," how would you respond when he says:

"What's this weekend retreat with the staff? What does a weekend of prayer have to do with the financial agenda of the parish?"

"I see we're listed in the bulletin as 'ministers of finance.' I'm a CPA. Isn't that enough? Why do I have to be a minister too? I thought that's what priests do."

"I've only got a limited amount of time for church work in addition to Sunday Mass and an occasional adult ed program. I don't want to get overinvolved in parish work and neglect my family and regular job. Is that likely to happen? How can I prevent it?"

You might want to make further application to yourself of the material in this chapter. Consider your role in the parish (e.g., parish council member, catechist, sponsor in the RCIA, volunteer in social outreach).

Is there a biblical story that parallels your role? (e.g., if you're

on the finance committee, perhaps the call of Levi, the tax collector, in Matthew 9:9-13 speaks to you; if you're on the parish council, perhaps the first council of Jerusalem, described in the Acts of the Apostles 15:1-29, parallels your situation.)

What does the biblical story say about your situation? Are there others you work with who could discuss this with you?

How can you bring the experience of your parish work to the liturgy? (e.g., if you're on a social action committee, you could recommend petitions for the poor in the prayers of the faithful; if you're a catechist or working in the RCIA, you could offer stories from those experiences to the priests for use in homilies.)

How does your parish work make you aware of the larger Church? (e.g., if you're on the parish council, you may be asked to study diocesan policies in order to offer advice to the pastor; if you're on the social action committee of an affluent parish, you may see an opportunity for supporting another parish that does not have adequate financial resources.)

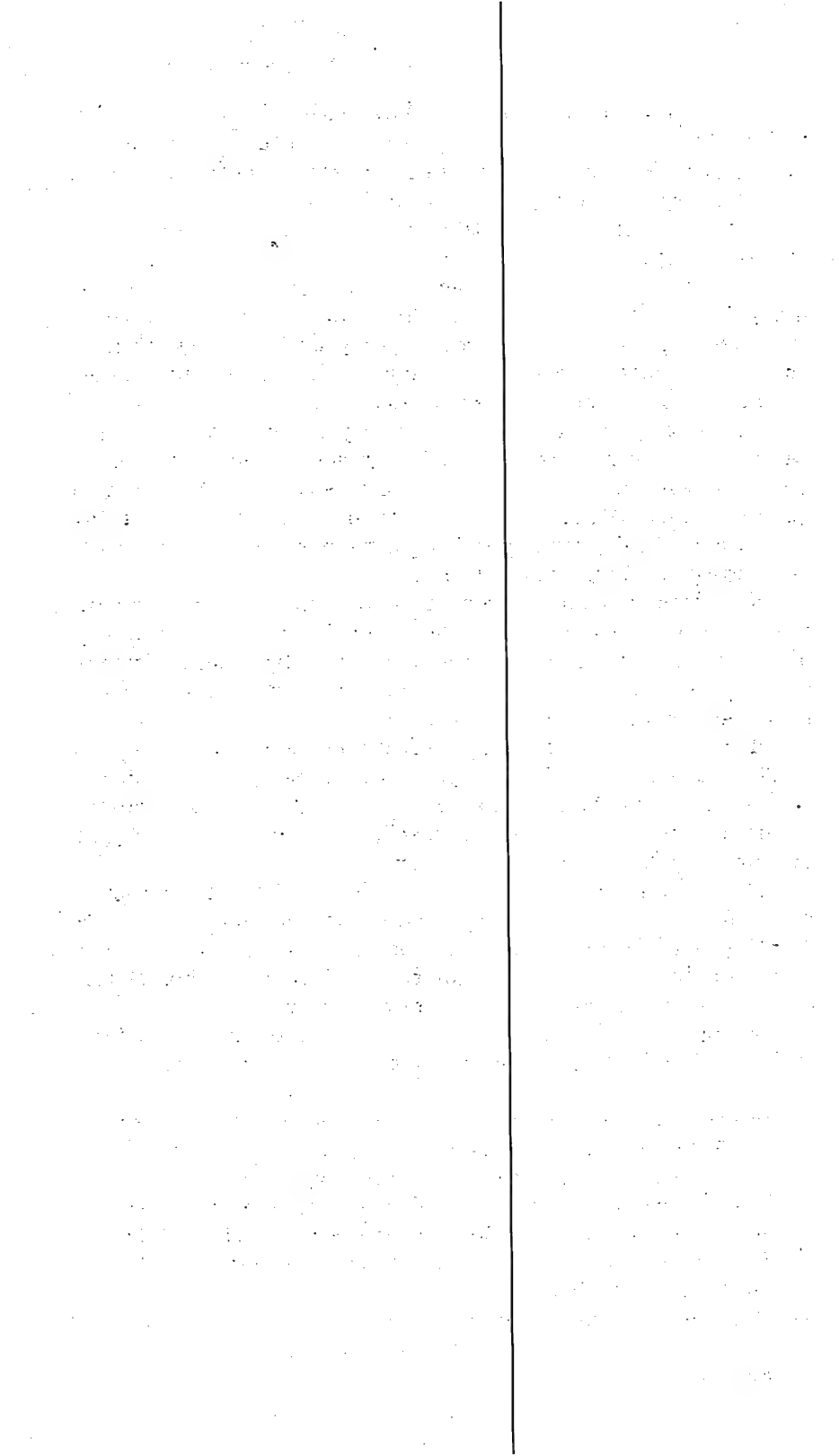
How does your parish work nurture your relationships with others? (e.g., if you're on an ecumenical committee, you may discover the contributions of other Christian traditions; if you're on the parish council, you may learn more about the pressures on parish staff and offer support to them.)

How do these relationships affect your spirituality? (e.g., if you're a eucharistic minister, you may deepen your love of the eucharist by discovering how much it means to homebound parishioners; if you're doing social outreach, your trust in God may be deepened by the example of the poor.)

These and similar questions can help you sharpen your sense of God's call to holiness, how your activity contributes to it, and what type of formation is going on in your life already. For maximum benefit, such reflection can be done with others, especially those who do the same type of work as you do.

As you consider these things, keep in mind what Pope John Paul II said, which summarizes the gist of this whole chapter:

Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness (cf. Rom 6:22; Gal 5:22), stirs up every baptized person and requires each to *follow and imitate Jesus Christ*, in embracing the Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal prayer, in family or in community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor, and the suffering (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 16).



CHAPTER THREE

Co-disciples in the Church

Suppose you have been elected to your parish council or some other committee in the parish. You have never served in this capacity before and you feel a little unsure of yourself as you come to the first meeting. When you arrive, there are already four other members present.

As you introduce yourself and begin conversing with them, you hear the way they describe their motives for being on the council.

John, who is sixty-seven and an original member of the parish when it was formed twenty years ago, says, "I never thought I'd be back on this council. But when Fr. Bill asked me, how could I refuse? The poor guy's so overworked, he needs all the help he can get. Besides, that's what it's all about these days—laity working with clergy to get the job done."

Mary Beth, who never married, is a middle-aged teacher in the local public high school and very active in civic organizations. She expresses her feelings this way. "I tell you I have served on many boards and committees but I don't think I was ever as honored as when I was asked to be on the parish council. To think that I would be involved in this way with the *Church* and the spiritual life of the parish is beyond anything I imagined."

Jim, who is married and has two children, is a sales representative for a large manufacturing company. He has been active in the parish in other capacities but has never served on the parish council. "I hope we don't just sit around and talk. I'm used to doing things. I really enjoyed running the food pantry for the poor and taking communion to the sick. I'm a hands-on kind of guy. Give me a job and I'll do it."

Wendy, who is divorced and has three children, is a musician and has been taking courses in the lay ministry training program

sponsored by the local seminary. "The first thing I'd like to see us do is get that liturgy committee straightened out. The things they put on in the name of liturgy are disgraceful. Liturgy is the heart of any parish and it needs some improvement in this parish."

As you listen to these comments, you may wonder what you've gotten yourself into. Each person seems to have a very different point of view and reason for being on the parish council. Are they all correct? Is this what it means to be a lay leader in today's Church? Is this what Vatican II intended?

Laity in the Church

Vatican II certainly intended for lay people to be involved in the Church.

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 10).

The laity's part to play, just as the clergy's, is rooted in baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred in confirmation. Thus, the Council emphasized that there is *one* People of God but many forms of service. "In the Church, there is a diversity of service but unity of purpose" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 2). This is the same way the Council viewed Christian spirituality, as seen in the last chapter.

Lay people, like the clergy, are called to play a role in the mission of the Church, not to hold honorary positions in the Church's organization. John Paul II reiterates this when he said, "It is not a question of simply *knowing* what God wants for each of us in the various situations of life. The individual must *do* what God wants . . ." (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 58).

Mary Beth's comments suggest that she is more taken with the honor of being on the parish council than with the task of working on the parish council.

Complementary Roles

These parallel roles of the laity and clergy are intended to complement one another. They are not supposed to function autonomously. In fact, they need each other (as the discussion on priesthood in the last chapter shows). The Council, which generally spoke from the clergy's point of view, said that the laity's

“ . . . activity is so necessary within church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness” (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 10).

The same point was made in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* when the Council said “The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy” (no. 21).

This does not mean, however, that the laity exist for the sake of the clergy. A little bit of this attitude is reflected in John's comments. It sounded like he is on the parish council just “to help Fr. Bill.” According to Vatican II, both John and Fr. Bill are on the council to help the parish; they are co-disciples.

Again speaking from the viewpoint of the clergy, the Council said:

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 30).

Many priests find this difficult if they are used to working independently, but the tendency to “go it alone” can be found among lay people also. Jim, for example, works alone as a sales representative, and his previous service in the soup kitchen and as a eucharistic minister reinforces this approach. He may find it difficult to collaborate with others on a parish council, seeing it as “just a lot of talk.”

Similarly, Wendy sounds like she is ready to step in and take over the liturgy committee, which is not quite the same as recognizing people's gifts and cooperating in a common undertaking with one heart.

Church Community

The Council stressed the spirit of cooperation between clergy and laity because it recognized that fundamentally the Church is a community of people. John Paul II stresses this repeatedly, often using the Latin term *communio* (communion) and invoking the image of the vine and the branches as well as the image of the body.

Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an “organic” communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity*

and a *complementarity* of vocations and states of life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the whole body* and offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 20).

To be in communion like this is indeed an honor, as Mary Beth recognized, and it is also an opportunity that may come through a request from the pastor or bishop, as John experienced. At the same time, church community means each lay person should be able to function as a free, mature believer who can take initiative and whose opinion should be respected by the clergy.

Vatican II made this very clear when it spoke of the priest's disposition toward the laity.

They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognize along with them the signs of the times (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 9).

This is a serious responsibility, and the clergy are expected "to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of lay people's dignity of the special role the laity have to play in the Church's mission" (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 9).

John Paul II elaborates this role, saying that pastors "... ought to accompany their work of discernment with guidance and, above all, encouragement so that lay associations might grow in Church communion and mission" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 31).

In this respect, John has it right: "that's what it's all about these days—laity working with clergy." And vice versa, of course. When this happens, everyone benefits.

A great many benefits are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their pastors: in the laity, a strengthened sense of personal responsibility, a renewed enthusiasm, a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their pastors. The latter, for their part, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more suitably come to decisions regarding spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, can more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 37).

When Vatican II first ventured into this realm of laity-clergy collaboration, it was understandably tentative. It tended to assume that laity would be hesitant and needed encouragement, if not permission, to make their needs and views known.

... by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which [they] may enjoy, [the laity are] permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on things which concern the good of the Church (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 37).

As the national consultation prior to the 1987 Synod showed, the laity today expect to be consulted on matters of importance in the Church.

Pastoral Councils

One of the most important structures developed since Vatican II to foster consultation is the parish pastoral council. In the consultation with laity prior to the 1987 synod, individuals and groups repeatedly affirmed that parish councils and other committees are a positive way for them to make their needs known, to contribute their gifts, and to experience church community.

This is what the revised *Code of Canon Law* envisions also. Through the parish pastoral council, "[t]he Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity" (canon 536).

The same type of consultation is encouraged at the level of the diocese through a pastoral council "whose responsibility it is to investigate under the authority of the bishop all those things which pertain to pastoral work, to ponder them and to propose practical conclusions" (canon 511).

These provisions are reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II who sees diocesan pastoral councils as

... the principal form of collaboration, dialogue, and discernment as well. The participation of the lay faithful in these Councils can broaden resources in consultation and the principle of collaboration—and in certain instances in decision-making—if applied in a broad and determined manner (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 25).

Thus, at every level of church life, Vatican II envisioned a spirit of cooperation, sharing, and mutual respect. This vision has been consistently shaping the life of the Church in the U.S.

In 1980 the U.S. bishops proclaimed, "We bishops praise the Lord for what is happening among the laity" and in 1987 the synod declared, in its recommendations to the pope, "Among the signs which increase hope is the fact that in our days, as in the first times of the Church, many lay Christians are quick to cooperate in church life and to take upon themselves various tasks which can be exercised without sacred orders."

But it is always easier said than done. There is room for improvement, and there are new challenges facing the Church that were not evident when Vatican II was taking place.

Continuing Questions

The spirit of co-discipleship in the Church called for by Vatican II and reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II faces some real challenges as the Church enters the future. Three of these are

- the shortage of ordained priests,
- the role of women, and
- the neglect of special individuals.

Priest Shortage

At the time of Vatican II, no one anticipated the sharp decline in the number of ordained priests. There are many explanations for this decline. One of the most important is that the priesthood is no longer the only option available to those who wish to dedicate themselves to church ministry. Indeed, the rapid growth of full-time lay ministries indicates how generous and committed today's Catholics are.

When the Council described the role of the laity in the Church, it usually presupposed that there was an ordained priest in the parish for the laity to work with. More and more this is not the case. And even where there is a priest residing in the parish, the demands of ministry are greater than one person can fulfill.

This situation raises a double question: How does a faith community function when a priest is not available, and what is the role of the laity in such cases?

A partial answer to the first question is given in Vatican II's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*. Speaking of the estab-

lishment of the Church in areas where it has not existed and where there is no resident priest, the Council stressed three activities.

1. *Christian witness* through relationships established with members of the community in which the parish resides (no. 11). These relationships respect people in their particular circumstances and thus build community gradually from within.
2. *Preaching and assembling* the people for spiritual enrichment (no. 13). Here the Council advocates the use of the catechumenate, which provides a structure for spiritual and intellectual growth and for putting Christian teaching into practice without fully sharing in the sacramental life of the Church.
3. *Forming Christian community* through exercising the priestly, prophetic, and pastoral roles of Jesus in the way appropriate to the laity (no. 15). Referring back to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, this means offering spiritual sacrifice (priestly role), evangelizing daily life, especially in the family (prophetic role), and working for justice and human dignity in society (pastoral role).

In short, faith communities without a priest should exercise all the functions of the Church that do not require a priest. Many communities are doing exactly that. As lay persons assume more of the leadership previously entrusted to priests, questions about ministry, which Pope John Paul II responded to on behalf of the synod arise.

1. Ordained ministries are primary in the Church, but they are always fundamentally oriented to the service of the Church in relationship with other ministries and gifts (cf. *Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 22).

2. Ministries proper to the laity derive from baptism, confirmation, and marriage and should be exercised in conformity with the specific vocation of the laity, which is in the world (cf. *Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 23).

3. In cases of emergency the laity can be authorized to "supply" for priests in those functions that do not require ordination, for example, the ministry of the word, presiding over liturgical prayers, conferring baptism, and distributing holy communion. In such cases, lay persons do not become pastors merely by carrying out a pastoral function (cf. *Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 23).

4. The appeal to emergency conditions should not be made too quickly or easily, and the word "ministry" should not be used

indiscriminately to describe every function in the Church (cf. *Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 23).

These reminders and cautions are not intended to downplay the tremendous contributions that lay people are making to the internal life of the Church. In fact, the pope joins the synod in expressing:

... a deep appreciation for the contribution of the lay faithful, both women and men, in the work of the apostolate, in evangelization, sanctification and the Christian animation of temporal affairs, as well as their generous willingness to supply in situations of emergency and chronic necessity (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 23).

The Role of Women

The shortage of priests raises more acutely and urgently the question about the role of women in the Church, although women's role includes much more than ordination. Vatican II could not have anticipated the extent of the movement for women's equality, but it did clearly denounce discrimination against women "... who are denied the chance freely to choose a husband, or a state of life, or to have access to the same educational and cultural benefits as are available to men" (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 29).

In addition, the Council observed that "[s]ince in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that their participation in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate should likewise develop" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 9).

Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the Council's denunciation of discrimination against women and went on to say:

Above all the *acknowledgment in theory* of the active and responsible presence of woman in the Church must be *realized in practice* (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 51).

For the pope this means, among other things, the participation of women in diocesan and parish pastoral councils as well as their transmission of faith through evangelization and catechesis (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 51).

None of these tasks is to be undertaken in isolation from men, nor is women's involvement a justification for the absence of men.

Rather,

... the coordinated presence of both men and women is to be pastorally urged so that the participation of the lay faithful in the salvific mission of the Church might be rendered more rich, complete and harmonious (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 51).

Other Neglected Ministers

Women are not the only members of the Church who have been neglected or overlooked as laborers for the Lord. In the same chapter where the pope discusses women's role he also mentions:

- Youth who "... must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as *leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 46). In addition "... youth make up an exceptional potential and a *great challenge for the future of the Church*" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 46). John Paul II sees in young people a reflection of the Church itself and encourages dialogue because "... youth have so much to share with the Church" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 46). When young people participate actively in the Church, they insure its youthfulness.
- Children who are "... the eloquent symbol and exalted image of those moral and spiritual conditions that are essential for entering into the Kingdom of God" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 47).
- Elderly, the "... symbol of someone rich in wisdom ..." who realize that their "... role in the Church and society does not stop at a certain age at all, but at such times knows only new ways of application" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 48).
- Sick, suffering, handicapped people who are "... bearers of the 'joy inspired by the Holy Spirit in much affliction' (1 Thes 1:6) and witnesses to Jesus' resurrection" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 53).

Inclusion of these often forgotten co-disciples strengthens the pope's insistence that

... one and all are called to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God according to the diversity of callings and situations, charisms and ministries. This variety is not only linked to age, but also to the difference of sex and to the diversity of natural gifts, as well as to careers and conditions affecting a person's life. It is a variety that makes the riches of the Church more vital and concrete (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 45).

Application

Suppose you go to your first parish council meeting aware of what Vatican II and Pope John Paul II have said about co-disciples in the Church. How would you interpret the comments of the four council members presented at the beginning of this chapter?

1. Is John on the council "to help out" Fr. Bill? In what sense is he right that the whole point is laity working with clergy? In what sense might he be mistaken?

2. How do you react to Mary Beth's feeling of being "honored" to be on the parish council? How do status and privilege relate to function and service in the Church for the laity? For the priests? For members of religious communities?

3. Do you think Jim is too much of an activist to be on the council? What should a parish council do after all? How does the initiative of Jim fit in with Mary Beth's feeling of being honored and John's desire to help Fr. Bill?

4. How would you feel if Wendy tried to "straighten out" the liturgy committee? What if she wanted to straighten out the parish council? What responsibilities do the council members (including the clergy) have to one another?

If you want to apply the material in this chapter more personally, think of the role you play in your parish (e.g., you may be on the parish council, on the education committee, a catechist, a lector, a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, etc.).

In this role, think of the relationships with others whom you would call co-disciples (e.g., with other members of a committee, with those your committee serves, with the priests of the parish, with staff members, with parishioners).

Is there a biblical story that expresses your experience? (e.g., perhaps the parable of the vineyard owner [Mt 20:1-19] who hires laborers at different hours of the day describes the different working relationships you experience; perhaps the dispute among the disciples about who is most important [Mk 9:33-37] describes your experience of working with others in the parish.)

How do your role and that of others you work with/for complement one another? (e.g., if you are on the education committee, input from the youth minister may be valuable for your planning; if you work with the RCIA, the liturgy committee is essential for your ministry with catechumens and candidates.)

Do these complementary roles foster community? If not, what could you do to help foster this goal?

How is the priest shortage felt in your parish? (e.g., there used to be two full-time priests, now there is one; there is no resident priest, only one who comes for liturgy every other week.)

Are there ways you and other parishioners can exercise your priestly, prophetic, or pastoral roles? (e.g., you could organize prayer groups or public prayer services; you could form support groups for parishioners in different occupations to help them give Christian witness in their work; you could offer assistance with social action projects.)

Are women equally represented in your committee or organization? Are women's views and suggestions respected as much as men's? If not, is there a way you can change this in your position? (e.g., you could appoint or invite women to attend your meetings; you could seek women's viewpoints and report them to the committee; you could suggest agenda items of special interest to women.)

The same questions should be asked about the representation and involvement of African Americans, Hispanics, Orientals, Native Americans, or other groups who are often excluded. Does your committee or organization actively seek them out? Do you expect them simply to *fit in*, or do you expect them to make suggestions that might require changes?

Are the young, elderly, sick, or disabled people represented in your committee or organization? What do you think they have to contribute to your work?

In all these efforts to be co-disciples, remember what Vatican II said about the roles of priests and laity:

Even though the priests of the new law by reason of the sacrament of Order fulfill the preeminent and essential function of father and teacher among the People of God and on their behalf, still they are disciples of the Lord along with all the faithful and have been made partakers of his kingdom by God, who has called them by his grace (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 9).

The laity should develop the habit of working in the parish in close union with their priests, of bringing before the ecclesial

community their own problems, world problems, and questions regarding salvation, to examine them together and solve them by general discussion (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 10).

CHAPTER FOUR

Collaborators in Mission

After Sunday Mass in your parish, coffee and donuts are served. Usually, a lot of informal church business is taken care of during this social hour. For example, off in one corner the coordinator of this year's parish street fair is recruiting volunteers. The street fair is the single biggest fund-raiser for the parish and requires a lot of volunteer help. The conversation goes like this:

Coordinator: We really need your help this year, especially with running some of the games. Can you give us a hand?

Parishioner 1: As a matter of fact, I have been thinking about getting more involved in the parish. I'm sure I can help. What do you have in mind?

Coordinator: We're asking everyone for two nights during the week, plus four books of raffle tickets. We're using our two-by-fours to raise money.

Parishioner 1: (Not quite catching the joke) I see. That might be a little tough. (Thinking) Oh, well, sure, put me down. Like I said, I want to get more involved, and this might be a good way to do it.

The coordinator spies another parishioner standing nearby.

Coordinator: And what about you? Can I count on your help with this year's street fair?

Parishioner 2: No, I'm afraid not.

Coordinator: If you're going to be out of town that week, we need lots of help getting ready.

Parishioner 2: No, it isn't that. I just think we spend too much time and energy on ourselves. Our real work as a parish isn't holding a street fair; it's helping the people who live on the streets. When you need volunteers for that, I'll be first in line.

Two responses, two attitudes. In busy post-Vatican II parishes there are many claims on the time, talent, and energy of parishioners. Some of these activities serve the Church's needs; some serve the needs of people who are not parishioners. And sometimes there is a tension between the two (similar to the tension between spirituality and work in chapter one or between clergy and laity in chapter two).

There is so much to do and there are so many opportunities both in the Church and in society that parishioners can feel deluged with requests and confused about their obligations. How should they respond?

Laity in the World

Before Vatican II, the laity's primary role was considered to be in the world, as noted in the introduction. Whether they functioned on their own initiative through a lay apostolate or on the initiative of the hierarchy through Catholic Action, lay activity in society was understood as an extension of the Church.

Vatican II reaffirmed this role while inviting the laity to participate more extensively in the internal workings of the Church.

In the post-Vatican II Church, lay people are expected to do both, but work in the Church should not detract from everyday responsibilities nor should it substitute for the primary obligation of extending God's Kingdom in society. In fact, Vatican II used some of its strongest language to dispel this idea, counting it "among the more serious errors of our age":

. . . [L]et there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 43).

The Council saw the differences between Church and society (like those between laity and clergy or spirituality and work) as complementary, and the roles of the laity in Church and society as enriching both. This was evident in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* where the Council spoke of "The Church and the World as Mutually Related" (no. 40) and elaborated this in terms of the help that the Church can give to the world and the help that the Church can receive from it (nos. 41-44).

Pope John Paul II has been equally insistent on the connection between life in the Church and life in the world. In his exhortation on the Christian lay faithful he speaks of this in two ways.

1. *Communion and Mission*—Throughout the exhortation the pope uses the biblical image of the vine and the branches to express the intimate, life-giving union of the faithful with Jesus and with one another. This union is not self-serving, however. It is for the sake of mission, to continue Jesus' saving work in society. The pope summarizes the connection this way:

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion* (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 32).

From this perspective, both the street fair and service to the street people have a place in the total life of the parish.

2. *Evangelization and Re-evangelization*—Pope John Paul II has consistently stressed the need for evangelization, declaring in the exhortation, "The entire mission of the Church is concentrated and manifested in *evangelization*" (no. 33). By evangelization the pope means not only proclaiming belief in Jesus with words, but carrying this proclamation out in actions (just as God's revelation occurs through words *and* deeds, as noted in chapter one).

This evangelizing task cannot be successful, however, if the Church neglects its own grounding and growth in the Gospel. Hence, the pope calls for re-evangelization (or, more literally, a "new" evangelization) and states:

Its purpose is the *formation of mature ecclesial communities*, in which the faith might radiate and fulfill the basic meaning of adherence to the person of Christ and his Gospel, of an encounter and sacramental communion with him, and of an existence lived in charity and in service (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 34).

It is clear, therefore, that neither Vatican II nor Pope John Paul II see service in the Church and service in the world as incompatible or in conflict with each other. In fact, Vatican II saw a direct relationship between the two.

Since they have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, lay people are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit. They are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 43).

In practice, however, some people still see their religious role only in terms of service within the church (perhaps like Parishioner 1 above), while others see their church role in terms of service within society (like Parishioner 2 above). How can the two be unified in practice? Vatican II responded in its discussion of the threefold service of the Church to human dignity, human community, and human activity. (These are the first three chapters of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.)

Human Dignity

Human dignity is a recognition of who each person is, as a creature of God, not what each person does or what status a person has in society.

Human dignity is also the first task Pope John Paul II mentioned in his chapter on the mission of the Church, saying:

To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family (Christian Lay Faithful, no. 37).

The challenge of respecting each person's dignity is always present. It can be especially acute in relations between races or ethnic groups, and it confronts the members of a parish as well. Will the volunteers at the parish street fair be respected for who they are and not just for what they are doing to make the street fair a success? Will the citizens who live on the streets be respected as human persons when assistance is offered them, or will they be seen as problems, cases, or even less-than-human nuisances?

Human Community

In contrast to an individualistic emphasis found in many parts of U.S. society, Vatican II saw the nature of the human person as defined by relationship, and likewise the nature of society. This mutual relationship is so essential that "the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other" (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 25).

Traditionally this communal aspect of human life has been referred to as "the common good." At Vatican II, another term, *socialization*, was used to refer to the increasingly interdependent features of modern life brought about by means of communication, travel, and technology. But the primary experience of the communal nature of human life is the relationship of men and women. This, in turn, leads to an affirmation of family as the core human community.

John Paul II reiterates these themes in his exhortation.

The human person has an inherent social dimension which calls a person from the innermost depths of self to *communion* with others and to the *giving* of self to others (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 40).

In this view, the pope envisions an interplay between the person and society, asserting that:

. . . all that is accomplished in favour of the person is also a service rendered to society, and all that is done in favour of society redounds to the benefit of the person (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 40).

Thus the questions for the two parishioners above are: How does work with individuals at the street fair help society? How does work within society for the homeless help the parish? And in both instances, is the relationship of women and men an example of their equality? Is the same true for relationships with African Americans, Hispanics, Orientals, Native Americans, or other groups incorrectly assumed to be deficient or inferior?

The pope is no less emphatic about the primacy of the family: "The first and basic expression of the social dimension of the person, then, is *the married couple and the family*" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 40). But the pope does not see the family as an isolated unit within society. There is the same interplay between families and society as there is between individuals and society.

The pope calls upon lay people "... to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus, and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always a more *active and responsible place* for proper growth and proper participation in social life" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 40).

The communal and family aspects of human life are realized in a special way within the Hispanic and African American Catholic communities. Among Hispanics the extended family, the special role of godparents, and the inclusion of friends in all types of fiestas witness to the value of community. Among African Americans the extended family often includes significant persons who are not blood relatives but whose importance is symbolized by the title of "aunt" or "uncle."

If the street fair strengthens the bonds of family life within the parish, and if it allows the parish to experience itself as a family, then the parish might be better prepared to respond to homeless families or to find ways of including homeless individuals in the parish family. Similarly, working with homeless people might reveal their perception of family and enable them to contribute to the life of families in the parish.

Human Activity

Vatican II put great stress on human activity, seeing it as a fulfillment of God's command to develop the creation and a way of deepening the bonds among individuals. In doing so, people are to respect the rightful autonomy of creation, i.e., the laws and values built into creation by the Creator. In other words, a person does not have to *Christianize* activity in order to make it holy, although a person does have to recognize and oppose the presence of evil and the forces that would distort the true purpose of human activity.

John Paul II is equally insistent on the value of human activity especially when the modern world evidences "... an impersonal functionalism, an overgrown bureaucracy, unjust private interests and an all-too-easy and generalized disengagement from a sense of duty" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 41). Rather than withdraw into a private religious corner, the faithful are expected to face these challenges through different types of involvement such as:

- *voluntary charitable works*, for which "[n]othing and no one will be able to substitute . . ." (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 41). Such charity is not an escape from other social duties, for "... a charity that loves and serves the person is never able to be separated from justice" (no. 42);

- *participating in political life*, indeed, “. . . the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in ‘public life’ . . .” (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 42); and
- *personalizing economic life*, which means recognizing that private property “possesses an intrinsic social function,” i.e., it is a way of distributing the common goods of society for the benefit of all rather than seeing how much each individual can amass privately.

Running a street fair and caring for the homeless are both human activities. The fundamental question is not which one should a parish do but how should each be done by a parish? The lessons learned about volunteers in a street fair might be used in recruiting volunteers for a homeless shelter. The needs of the homeless can shape the decisions about what to do with the profits from the street fair.

As Pope John Paul II reminds everyone:

Without doubt the Church has the Kingdom of God as her supreme goal, of which “she on earth is its seed and beginning,” and is therefore totally consecrated to the glorification of the Father. However, the Kingdom is the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people: with this in mind, then, the Church walks and lives, intimately bound in a real sense to their history (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 36).

Continuing Questions

The principles stated so clearly by Vatican II and Pope John Paul II do not always look so clear in the midst of everyday reality. Questions about the laity’s collaboration in the mission of the Church arise in two areas in particular:

- support for secular activity and
- representation of the Church in secular activity.

Support for Secular Activity

In theory, Vatican II and Pope John Paul II leave no doubt that the primary role of the laity is in the world. This is consistently described as their special vocation, as work that is uniquely and properly theirs.

In practice, however, the primary appeal to the laity from church leaders (mostly clergy) is for church involvement. The training programs of the Church are usually aimed at church ministries rather than the daily activities of lay people in business, the economy, culture, education, civic life, etc.

This emphasis is partly due to the fact that church leaders inevitably view the laity from their own *church* perspective and consider what is needed to strengthen the internal life of the Church. This emphasis is also partly due to the negative connotations still surrounding the word *secular* and everything that pertains to secular life.

This is not how Vatican II or Pope John Paul II envision the formation of the laity. The Council said:

Since the laity participate in the Church's mission in a way that is their own, their apostolic training acquires a special character precisely from the secularity proper to the lay state and from its particular type of spirituality (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 29).

For the Council, the focus was on the laity's personal relationships with other people in society. "If good human relations are to be cultivated, then it is necessary for genuine human values to stand at a premium, especially the art of living and working on friendly terms with others and entering into dialogue with them" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 29).

The Council even suggested a practical method for helping people prepare for their role:

. . . there is need, right from the start of training, to learn gradually and prudently to see all things in the light of faith, to judge and act always in its light . . . (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 29).

This was the prevailing approach of Catholic Action at the time of the Council.

Finally, the Council envisioned all the resources of the Church always contributing to the formation of the laity, citing in particular the family and parents, the parish, schools and colleges, various groups, associations, and organizations.

Pope John Paul II also presses for implementation, asserting that ". . . the formation of the lay faithful must be placed among the priorities of a diocese. It ought to be so placed within the plan of pastoral action that the efforts of the whole community (clergy,

lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 57).

Like Vatican II, John Paul II highlights the secular orientation of lay formation. Doctrinal formation should enable the faithful "... to give a reason for their hoping in view of the world and its grave and complex problems" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 60).

Along with catechesis, there should be "... a more decided Christian promotion of *culture*, in response to the perennial yet always new questions that concern individuals and society today" and "... a more exact knowledge—and this demands a more widespread and precise presentation—of the *Church's social doctrine*" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 60).

The conclusion from this survey is clear. If the laity's primary contribution to the mission of the Church is in the world, then it is for church leaders, who are not in the world in the same way as the laity are, to channel the Church's resources in this direction.

Representation of the Church

As the laity fulfill the Church's mission in the world, however, they face the further question: In what sense do they represent the Church? Both Vatican II and Pope John Paul II insist that the Church has no earthly ambitions (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 3) or partisan political-economic platform (no. 76). And yet, in order for the laity to transform the world from within, as they are expected to do, they must take definite positions and work for specific policies, aligning themselves with all sorts of groups while preserving the vision of God's Kingdom.

When Vatican II faced this fact, it said:

It is of supreme importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between the activities of Christians, acting individually or collectively in their own name as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and their activity acting along with their pastors in the name of the Church (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 76).

This distinction is clear enough and it reflects similar cautions about using the name "Catholic" (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 24) or claiming the authority of the Church for a personal viewpoint (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 43).

But this same distinction suggests that the laity represent only themselves unless they act with the approval or on behalf of the hierarchy. Since most lay people do not function in such a formal manner, this position suggests that their secular involvement is a private matter that does not really represent the Church.

Pope John Paul II offsets this impression with a strong appeal to the lay faithful "never to relinquish their participation in 'public life,'" stating further:

Charges of careerism, idolatry of power, egoism and corruption that are oftentimes directed at persons in government, parliaments, the ruling classes, or political parties, as well as the common opinion that participating in politics is an absolute moral danger, does not in the least justify either skepticism or an absence on the part of Christians in public life (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 42).

As if to underscore the religious element even more, the pope recalls that justice, which public service aims at, is a virtue and that "[t]he spirit of *service* is a fundamental element in the exercise of political power" (*Christian Lay Faithful*, no. 42).

In grappling with these unresolved questions, all the Christian faithful can keep the words of Vatican II in mind:

... [T]here is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting [people] from building up the world or making them disinterested in the good of their fellows: on the contrary, it is an incentive to do these very things (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 34).

Application

Suppose during next week's coffee-after-Mass a conversation takes place between Parishioner 1 (who is content to work on the parish street fair) and Parishioner 2 (who wants the parish to serve the homeless people on the streets). If you were part of that conversation:

- How would you respond to the desire of Parishioner 1 "to get more involved in the parish"? If you were on a committee (such as the street fair, or liturgy, or ecumenism) or part of an organization (such as the Scouts or St. Vincent de Paul), would you immediately recruit Parishioner 1 for your activities?

- How would you feel about the judgment of Parishioner 2 that “we spend too much time and energy on ourselves”? Is this true of your parish? Of your role in the parish?
- What is there about Parishioner 1 that you’d like Parishioner 2 to appreciate more, and what is there about Parishioner 2 that you’d like Parishioner 1 to appreciate? What do each of them say to you about the laity’s collaboration in the mission of the Church?

If you want to apply the material of this chapter more personally, consider your work in the parish and its connection to the Church’s mission in the world.

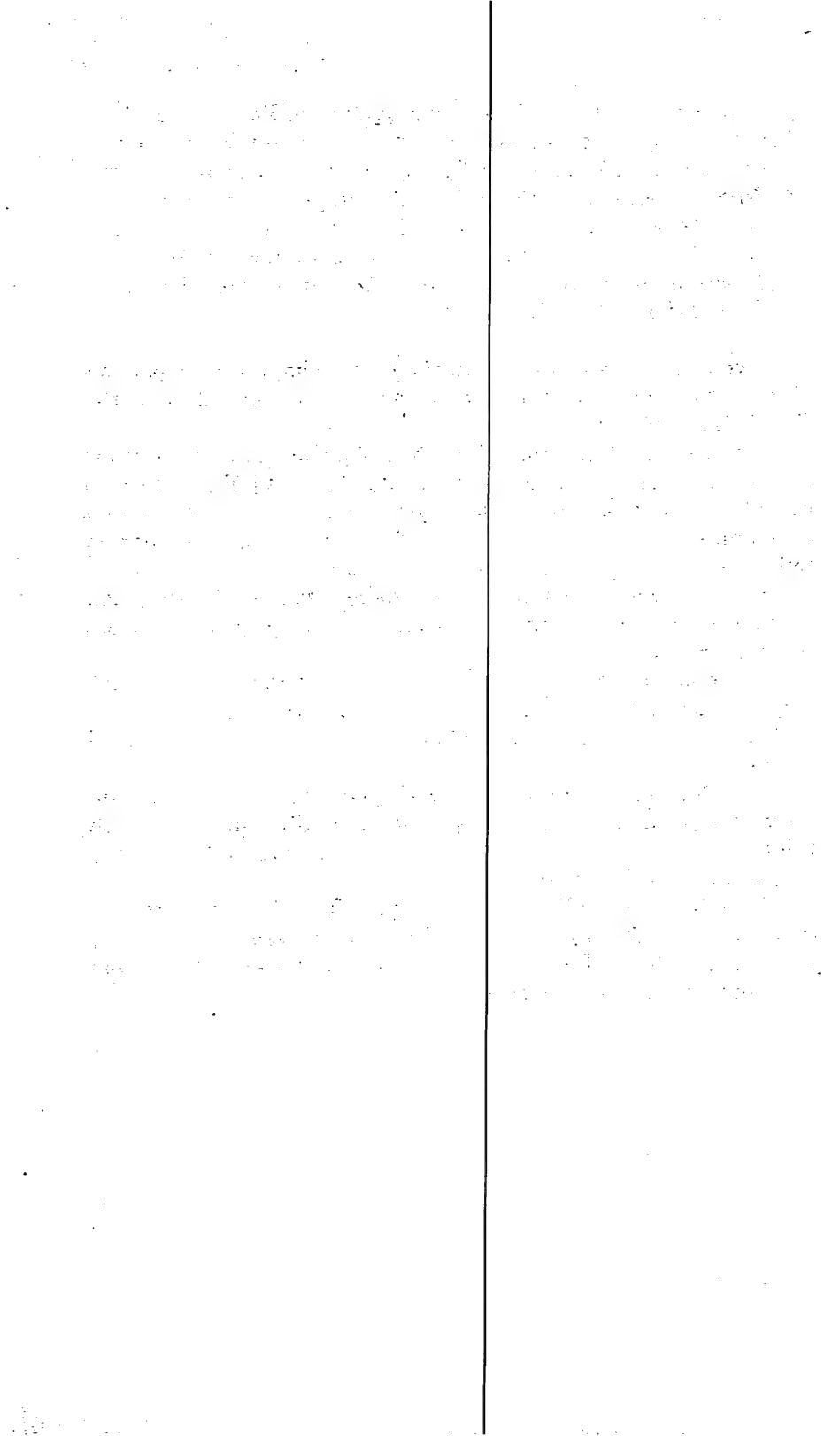
Is there a biblical story that sheds light on this connection? (e.g., if you’re on a social outreach committee, the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46 may describe your experience; if you’re on an ecumenical committee, the faith of the non-Jewish soldier in Luke 7:1-10 may parallel your experience.)

How does your role in the parish support human dignity? (e.g., if you are a eucharistic minister, your care for those you visit lets them know they are respected.)

How does your role in the parish promote human community? (e.g., if you’re on the parish council, you take time to get to know each member and ask about what’s going on in their personal lives.)

How does your role in the parish give true value to human activity? (e.g., if you are on an education committee and work with volunteer teachers, you thank them for the time and creativity they commit to their teaching.)

In your everyday life and work, apart from formal church activities, do you feel you represent the Church? Is it important to you that you do so? How does your church involvement help you carry out your mission in society?



Glossary

Apostolate. A general term referring to the particular way a member of the Church carries out her or his part of the Church's mission (e.g., the family apostolate, the teaching apostolate, the lay apostolate, the priestly apostolate).

Apostolic Exhortation. The name given to the pope's reflections on a certain topic, which do not contain dogmatic definitions or policy directives. Customarily, the pope's reflections on the proceedings of a synod of bishops are presented as an apostolic exhortation.

Canon Law. The norms governing the practice of Catholics throughout the Church. Each norm is expressed in a canon. Also called universal or church law.

Catechumenate. The process of instruction and formation after a nonbaptized person has been enrolled as a member of the Church. The length of preparation and specific content are adapted to the needs of each person. Vatican II restored the catechumenate as part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Charismatic. From the Greek word for gift or grace, charismatic refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they are manifested in the lives of individuals and communities. These gifts take many forms, including the gifts of prayer commonly associated with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Co-disciples. A term used by the U.S. bishops at the 1987 synod to signify the equality and close working relationship of all the members of the Church as students (disciples) of the Lord's will.

Collaboration. The working together of all the baptized, each contributing specific, personal gifts. This term conveys the spirit of sharing and mutuality that should characterize relations between clergy and laity.

Common Good. The collective well-being of a society or large community (e.g., a city, a county, a state). The common good refers to both the ideal, good life of a society and the means available for achieving it.

Communion. Also used in its Latin form, *communio* to designate the close, spiritual bonds among the baptized who are in union with Jesus. When used in this way, the term does not refer to "Holy Communion," the sharing of eucharist.

Constitution. A Vatican II document that addresses doctrinal questions and offers doctrinal responses. The four Constitutions of Vatican II are on the Church, the Liturgy, Revelation, and the Church in the Modern World.

Decree. A Vatican II document that addresses practical questions within the Church and offers guidelines or principles for action. The nine Decrees of Vatican II are on communications media, ecumenism, Eastern Catholics, bishops, priestly formation, religious life, laity, priests, and missionary activity.

Ecumenical. Literally refers to "the whole" of something, e.g., a whole household, a whole community, a whole culture. In modern times, it refers to the effort to restore unity in the whole of Christianity. Sometimes used as a synonym for interdenominational or interreligious.

Evangelization. The proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. This proclamation is in both words and deeds. It is closely associated with efforts for peace and justice as a primary sign of God's Kingdom.

Faithful. A term referring to all the baptized disciples of Jesus. It is equivalent to the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, or the Church. When a specific group within the faithful is intended, a further designation is used (e.g., the *lay* faithful).

Holiness. The condition of a person who is in union with God. Holiness refers to the relationship that God initiates and to the human fulfillment that this relationship entails.

Mission. The overall task entrusted to the Church by Jesus. Because this task is to proclaim the good news to the world and make disciples of all people, mission is often associated with the Church's role in society rather than the care of its own members.

Office. A formal role in the structure of the Church, usually requiring ordination or an explicit authorization from a pastor or bishop. One who holds office is considered to have the power to carry out the tasks of the office as well as the authority to do so (e.g., the office of bishop, pastor, preacher).

Pastoral Care. The response of church members to those who are experiencing a crisis or stress in their lives (e.g., bereavement, depression, illness, retirement). Because such care is usually offered through a parish or a church agency, and often through a priest, it is called *pastoral* care.

Pastoral Council. The general term in Canon Law for representative groups in the Church who offer advice to those who hold office. The two primary types of pastoral councils are *parish* and *diocesan*.

Pastors of Souls. A traditional term for the parish priest in contrast to priests involved in other types of work such as teaching or administration.

Religious Communities. The common designation for those who make solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as members of an order or institute approved by the Vatican. Such members are often called simply *religious* and their way of life, *religious life*.

Sacred Orders. The sacrament of ordination conferred on deacons, priests, and bishops. Those who are ordained are sometimes said to be "in sacred orders."

Spirituality. The way of life and activities of a person who is responding to God's call to holiness. Spirituality often refers to the type of prayer, worship, and spiritual exercises that a person uses.

Synod. A Greek term referring to any type of gathering or meeting. In church usage after Vatican II it refers primarily to the meeting of bishops representing each country of the world every three years to discuss with the the pope issues of concern to the whole Church.

Temporal Affairs. An ecclesiastical term referring to secular life and activity. A related expression, *temporal order*, refers to the way society is structured and governed.

Tradition. All the means by which God's grace and truth are handed on through history. The one word, *tradition*, often refers to both the content and the process of handing on.

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